

# America's Machiavelli Problem

## Restoring Prudent Leadership in US Strategy

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### Abstract

The end of Pres. Barack Obama's first term coincided with the five hundredth anniversary of *The Prince* (1513) by Niccolò Machiavelli. Some analysts combined these milestones and praised the president's foreign policy performance as heeding Machiavelli's classic advice: the president, impressively, adapted lessons of *The Prince* in crafting a realistic and prudent first-term grand strategy. Avoiding major war or new commitments, he never agonized over legal or moral niceties when focused violence was necessary, as in the operation to eliminate Osama bin Laden. In the second term, however, the president's highly cautious strain of defensive realism fared poorly—a verdict upheld by commentary from his former lieutenants. This unwelcome turn of fortune calls into question whether strategy pundits and scholars correctly interpreted Obama's overcorrection, much less Machiavelli's imprimatur, during the first term. Contrary to the administration's recent justifications for “common sense” risk avoidance, Machiavelli's sophisticated notions of realism and statesmanship demand a strategy that more astutely blends daring and caution, including the articulation of an ambitious public purpose for US power. A genuinely prudent strategy, according to Machiavelli, accepts some near-term military risk to do good—and do well—in the long run.<sup>1</sup>

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In strategic studies it is said that generals tend to fight the last war, and scholars, too, tend to grasp meaningful patterns and overarching solutions only as problems pass into history. So it was with Michael Ignatieff's 2013 article "Machiavelli Was Right," which favorably compared President Obama's first-term foreign policy with classic ruthlessness, given presidential readiness to violate the sovereignty of nominal allies in prosecuting Islamic terrorists.<sup>2</sup> Scholars who praised Obama's early policies, as the right strategic balance between using power and evading quagmire wars into which his predecessor dragged America, now share Ignatieff's fate of offering too tidy a solution to the previous problem of international hyperactivity and overextension. Pres. George W. Bush's critics, who became President Obama's defenders, crowded underneath a very big tent of "strategic realism," but the larger pattern of Obama's tenure clearly is one of committed restraint, not Machiavellian power politics.<sup>3</sup>

Machiavelli's place in history as a leading political thinker has been used to justify the current strategy of American retrenchment. But, a more balanced appreciation of Machiavelli would actually help American statesmen recognize the *costs* inherent in this policy. A Machiavellian perspective would judge that President Bush was imprudent in implementing his ambition for American power, but we have been wrong to assume it therefore endorses a reaction of having too little ambition. Ignatieff drew a deceptive conclusion from a favorable comparison of Obama in his first term and Machiavelli: success in the turbulent post-9/11 world required American statesmen to learn they "should not care" about how the use of force related to liberal ideals. Force was an instrument with material not moral consequences, and it therefore should be used to dispatch irreconcilable enemies like Osama bin Laden as cheaply and efficiently as possible. This validation, though, was not the correct reading of Machiavelli. Moreover, it paved the way for ill-conceived, less-effective strategic withdrawal.

President Obama's seeming string of first-term successes, along with praise for his toughness, faded as America and its chief executive encountered severe turbulence shortly after "Machiavelli Was Right" appeared. Machiavelli ultimately is correct about many things amid the geostrategic reality of America's constrained resources; however, the reasons,

*contra* Ignatieff and crucial for candidates and citizens to consider before a new commander in chief takes the helm in 2017, have more to do with seeing the danger of the American prince *not caring enough* to venture for strategic gains.<sup>4</sup>

After its recent lurching from one extreme to another, it is possible to find a sober middle course for American foreign policy. However, this will require recovery of principles that find a genuine balance between serving our ideals and employing the power needed to safeguard them.<sup>5</sup> Notwithstanding the administration's protestations of strategic realism, Machiavelli strongly opposed simple formulas to avoid war; rather, his cases and lessons inform the prudent judgment needed in given circumstances. His counsel is not so alien to America's tradition of accepting and coping with the moral burdens and material costs of wielding power in a dangerous world. Today, Americans must consult Machiavelli with care. As the United States enters the next presidential campaign and public debate begins over the strategic direction of American foreign policy, the country should transcend its present discourse on Machiavelli. *The Prince*, in other words, should not be oversimplified to exonerate either crusading belligerence or Panglossian minimalism in American strategy. Machiavelli instead ought to enlighten our strategic debates, helping us account for—rather than shade—the *calculated risks* democratic leaders must take to secure the national interest.

To show how this classic work relates to recent American strategy—especially to understand how the United States has lost strategic balance by overcorrecting from massive ambition to retrenchment—we place foreign policy in the context of grand-strategic thinking. We follow several recent works in defining grand strategy as the overarching conception that guides a rigorous calibration of ends and means that serve a state's view of international affairs and its place in the global order. Policy responses to individual crises are shaped and subsequently interpreted through a broader conception of global order conceived by grand strategy. When policies fail, this suggests problems at the root level of grand strategy—the deeper or higher orientation of policy.<sup>6</sup> Results now rattling world opinion and policy gambles premised upon war-avoidance seem just as likely to produce disappointing results and indicate a need to revisit our fundamental understanding of grand strategic principles.

## Consulting Machiavelli to Diagnose America

America's miscomprehension of Machiavelli's advice in *The Prince* is of greatest concern to political leaders and their counselors, but it also matters to "we the people," who, under the Constitution, must hold leaders accountable. The commander in chief's extraordinary powers notwithstanding, in national security affairs and in other aspects of national life, Americans get the leadership they deserve. As a diplomat and organizer of militia for the Florentine Republic at the turn of the sixteenth century, Machiavelli recognized this pattern. In fact, he faced dilemmas of grand strategy surprisingly similar to those confronting America's Founders a few centuries later. Machiavelli sought a new kind of prince who could unite the principalities and republics of a divided (and conquered) Italy. A Machiavellian grand-strategic perspective advises a balance of hard power and diplomacy and is wary of overreliance on one versus the other. Likewise, American statesmen, led by George Washington, sought to galvanize elite and public opinion to unite querulous petty states into a *novus ordo seclorum*, "new order for the ages." There was much idealism—a sense of moral truth—motivating America's Founders, but they also adopted Machiavelli's hard insights and his regard for experienced judgment. They consulted the Florentine in direct study and also through the Enlightenment writers who had moderated Machiavelli's new doctrine of executive power. The American presidency is one product of this moderating of Machiavellism: a single prince, as commander in chief and master strategist, but tamed by a legislative branch sharing the war power, a Senate sharing many foreign affairs powers, and a requirement to be elected to a fixed term (not to mention threat of impeachment).<sup>7</sup>

America's robust sense of its exceptionalism always has included a blend of realism and idealism.<sup>8</sup> This mostly has served it well, supplying motivation for individuals to pledge their lives, fortunes, and sacred honor for the good of the republic. The sense that America stood for universal ideals—but also for the right to defend both its interests and ideals—fixed legitimizing purpose to US power as it expanded and eventually dominated. Still, American exceptionalism also encouraged statesmen to ban Machiavelli from its national narrative and traditions. We tend to refer to Machiavelli mostly as the Renaissance popes did—a teacher of evil—and neither we nor they have fully understood the disgraced bureaucrat.<sup>9</sup> His advice, to be "devious and ruthless rather than

honorable and fair,” would undermine our claims to exceptionalism, defile the foreign policy legacies of presidents like Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Franklin Roosevelt, and condemn future American leaders to be no better than the self-serving European princes in Machiavelli’s time.<sup>10</sup> Realist international relations theory that influenced American strategists in the twentieth century hid its debt to Machiavelli and instead emphasized roots in Thucydides and Hobbes, borrowing liberally from rationalist cost-benefit analyses developed by contemporary economists.

Unfortunately, as the theologian Reinhold Niebuhr admonished after World War II, American exceptionalism can too easily metastasize into a reflexive confidence that moral superiority underwrites military superiority—the happy fallacy that right makes might.<sup>11</sup> In denigrating Machiavelli, even as they conceded after five hundred years that he is “too smart to ignore,” America’s political class failed to comprehend how much his advice to the new modern breed of rulers could help their republic in a difficult time, perhaps just one or two false steps from hegemonic collapse.

Counselors to President Obama understandably emphasized the rhetorical appeal of Machiavelli’s astuteness and flexibility on moral norms for a strategy of rebalancing or retrenchment. American exceptionalism as the world-enforcer of liberal ideals, under this customary interpretation of *The Prince*, is a stupid extravagance. A president must instead appear to be good to the voting masses at home and allies abroad but never shrink from violence or betrayal of ideals when necessary to secure the state. These points are well taken *qua* conventional Machiavellism, but we suggest this is a misreading of Machiavelli’s text and is, moreover, not what America needs to hear amid our post–Cold War confusion—regardless of what many elites and voters might prefer to hear.

### **Prodigal Grand Strategy of Restraint**

President Obama’s first term seemed to strike a balance between liberal ideals and the realistic need to use force in some circumstances. In his strategic rhetoric, he tempered invocations of international law and denunciations of his predecessor’s unilateralism to reveal a Machiavellian side: both fox and lion. The new commander in chief’s Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech, delivered less than a year after his inauguration,

began “by acknowledging the hard truth,” describing force as sometimes both necessary and morally justifiable.<sup>12</sup> He reinforced this message by retaining the thoroughly realist Robert Gates as secretary of defense, authorizing the troop surge in Afghanistan, dramatically extending drone warfare in the US Central Command’s area of operation, and expanding strikes by special forces—including the raid on Osama bin Laden in Pakistan.

Even with significant Democratic losses during the 2010 midterm elections, foreign policy remained a successful arena for the president. Some achievements were diplomatic, including Senate ratification of a New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty to reduce nuclear weapons, the seemingly productive reset with Russia, the shepherding passage of a new Strategic Concept for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) after Afghanistan, and the nuclear negotiations with Iran (accompanied, in apparent Machiavellian *sang-froid*, with diffidence about the 2009 Green Movement and Iran’s brutal suppression of it). Meanwhile, drone warfare decimated al-Qaeda leadership in Pakistan and the Arabian Peninsula. In late 2013 Ignatieff could write that Obama’s success derived from a Machiavellian capacity not to overthink the human cost or moral implications of using force—or of refusing to intervene (as in Iran or Syria). The candidate of “Hope and Change” had internalized Leslie Gelb’s interpretation of *The Prince*: “Power is power. It is neither hard nor soft nor smart nor dumb.”<sup>13</sup> Only the people who allow politics at home to cloud their common sense abroad can be dumb.

However, by 2014 many of Obama’s victories turned to ashes. Relations with Russia fell to Cold War levels, not least given the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Libya fell into anarchy after America’s partial engagement then immediate military disengagement. The progress salvaged in Iraq disintegrated after America’s complete military withdrawal. Equivocation in Syria, Central Europe (pulling our missile defense sites from Poland and the Czech Republic), Ukraine, and Egypt encouraged enemies and discouraged friends. Finally, the promise of a new era of free trade in the Pacific yielded to deadlock and acrimony—not least, regarding China.<sup>14</sup> Friends and adversaries alike perceived the proposed American “rebalancing” to Asia as really just a pivot away from the Middle East, because when coupled with cuts in defense spending and global military posture, America’s presence in Asia was at best static in the face of Chinese territorial provocations and at worst a relative decline. Amid

many conventional commentaries on these reverses or doldrums, with Obama supporters arguing that they paled in comparison to avoiding the costs of another war, retired US diplomat Roger Harrison sought a diagnosis of deeper causes through an imagined dialogue between Machiavelli and Obama. “Your mistake, if you will excuse my frankness,” said his Machiavelli, “was to judge your former success as a function of virtuous leadership rather than the gift of fortune.”<sup>15</sup> This warning against complacency, or reliance upon simple doctrines, captured the complexity and wry sophistication of Machiavelli better than Ignatieff’s shopworn teacher-of-evil meme.

In his first term, Obama sometimes was a ruthless prince and generally was a fortunate one. Bin Laden and his Pakistani hosts became careless. Old autocrats vanished with the Arab Spring, and others—particularly Syria’s Bashar Assad—seemed fated to follow. Russia apparently acquiesced (grudgingly) to the EU and NATO push eastward and saw common ground in keeping nuclear weapons out of Iranian hands. All this was fragile to the point of being a hypnotic mirage. The Obama administration nonetheless deemed it the result of just the right mixture of violence, prudence, and foresight. Senator Obama’s campaign denunciations of overreliance on force and American exceptionalism seemed vindicated, while inexhaustible strategic patience and flexibility were the new virtues. In fact, the new president was just as wedded as his predecessor to the infallibility of strategic dogma and now, in quite un-Machiavellian fashion, failed to see Nemesis, the classical spirit who lies in wait for self-satisfied statesmen.

Machiavelli knew that evil deeds or cunning diplomacy by themselves cannot grant a prince immunity from ill fortune or the turbulence of human affairs. The real measure of a prince, at the precarious summit of power, is his ability to overcome fortune with a blend of calculation, strength, cunning, and decisiveness that he called princely *virtù*. An executive must strive to rule fortune rather than be ruled by it. Nowadays, Obama’s critics accuse him of having no strategy at all, merely reacting to unanticipated events rather than dictating the pace of change.<sup>16</sup> Indeed both friends and enemies, at home and abroad, sense this as not the wisdom of strategic patience but incapacity. The result, as Machiavelli predicts, has been a run of foreign policy disasters—and, with the Iran deal, further retrenchment from forceful leadership and forward presence in supporting the liberal global order, even while disclaiming any such intent. In domestic terms,

the president's negotiating approach (to sideline Congress and accept weak final terms) further polarized relations with Congress; internationally, the high price included his cautious stance toward the strategic and human disaster in Syria—now spilling into Europe—and an emboldened Iran and Russia as geopolitical actors.<sup>17</sup>

Machiavelli offers hints as to why such things will happen: the habitually cautious prince learns, as does the habitually impetuous one, that “if the times and affairs change, he is ruined because he does not change his mode of proceeding.”<sup>18</sup> This is especially the case when one's ways seem to have been successful, for example during the first terms of George W. Bush and Obama. Beyond this are sins to which rulers seem heir. *The Prince* especially advises care in selecting counselors: a ruler should choose “wise men in his state . . . to speak the truth to him . . . [and] ask them about everything.”<sup>19</sup> Obama seemed to heed this at first, with the appointments of Robert Gates, Hillary Clinton, and David Petraeus among others. Memoirs of that period tell us that debate among these advisors often was heated, just what a prudent executive should desire.<sup>20</sup> At the inauguration of his second term, however, the president chose to refurbish his foreign policy team, appointing insiders whom he liked, trusted, and, not incidentally, dominated as their chief patron. Are these the “flatterers” whom Machiavelli describes as a “plague” to any prince?<sup>21</sup>

However, the deeper issue for American leadership is that much conventional advice on power, the summing up or refinement of Machiavelli's wisdom, has been flawed. Despite profuse analysis for the quincentenary of *The Prince*, a subtler reading of Machiavelli still is needed, coupled with cautions about how American statesmen can consult his works.

### **Interpreting Machiavelli: A Teacher of Prudence**

*The Prince* does employ shocking irreverence. By assaulting readers with story after story of historical deception, betrayal, and murder as elements of a new princely *virtù*, Machiavelli seemingly wanted to bludgeon potential converts into accepting the necessity of evil, or “dirty hands,” to secure the state. Yet, in distilling Machiavelli to such an essence, the experts bypass complexities not easily captured for a presidential memo. The allure of his iconoclasm, his confident astuteness, leads us to overlook enduring tensions in his counsels.



Contrary to partisan attacks on President Obama's deliberative (critics say halting) foreign policy, it is unlikely that after six years in office the commander in chief lost all determination or unlearned his competence. Rather than forget the lessons of Machiavelli, it is more likely the young president, with little foreign policy experience when he entered office, never learned them well enough. For that, we should not blame the student alone but also his several teachers, broadly construed—the policy advisers (*consiglieri*) and scholars who have interpreted Machiavelli for the age of the *Pax Americana*. It is not so much that Carnes Lord, Leslie Gelb, and most recently Michael Ignatieff are dead wrong in what they wrote.<sup>22</sup> It is that more needs to be said because such counsel infantilizes American princes by glossing over their most demanding strategic dilemmas—those pitting US interests against our ideals. The conventional advice resolutely adheres to *one side* of a profound debate about what Machiavelli really meant in his primer for a new, distinctly modern brand of political leader.

## Two Contemporary Schools on Machiavelli

The predominant view has roots in Friedrich Meinecke's post-World War I study, *Machiavellism*, but was revised by Leo Strauss's *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (1958) and the essays by Harvey Mansfield that it inspired (*Machiavelli's Virtue* [1996]).<sup>23</sup> For these scholars and for most readers, Machiavelli's brutal experience in the service of Florence—as it declined militarily and politically from destructive competition among Italian city-states, a wave of imperial intrigue from France, and the repressive protection of the Medici family—spurred him to unprecedented boldness. Mansfield sees Machiavelli's greatness in his aim to be Prince of princes, conquering future rulers and subjecting them to modern orders in the only way open to him: inventing a radical but attractive philosophy. The universal struggle to found the best regime on earth now would have a fair chance of succeeding once Machiavelli, with nothing left to lose, hazarded the master stroke. Reason would free politics “from the superintendence of Christianity.”<sup>24</sup> Still, the astute prince would not do evil uniformly, in a doctrinaire way, for this would provoke blowback and be ineffective; rather, in his subtle teaching, “it is necessary to a prince . . . to learn to be able not to be good, and to use this and not use it according to necessity.”<sup>25</sup>

In the introduction to his translation of *The Prince*, Mansfield conceded the strong temptation to avert one's eyes from the stark truth and to reach for excuses to downplay Machiavelli's blasphemy, but, he insisted, *The Prince* ultimately was more interesting and significant if we encountered its spirit of *realpolitik*—a politics without God. This is just one of several themes in Mansfield's account of Machiavelli's intent and legacy, but it has enthralled a new breed of counselors who would tap Machiavelli to enshrine a certain prototype of American statesmen. Lord, Gelb, Ignatieff, and many others in relevant periodicals of the American foreign policy establishment must keep Machiavelli interesting for their soft, blinkered, largely Christian audience whose instinct moves them to go about politics without blemishing either the nation's founding values—freedom, equality, and justice through the rule of law—or the commandments of God. In this strategic realism influenced by the Straussian interpretation, what is interesting about Machiavelli is his ruthless, fearless iconoclasm in speaking truth about power to Power. These Machiavellian counselors to America would upend our customs and courtesies of diplomacy, slap us across the face, wrench us away from hopeful reverie, and batter us with shocking, brutal, yet enticingly risk-free requirements for maintaining our position in global affairs.

However, a major problem with this use of Strauss's and Mansfield's stark renderings of Machiavelli is that Americans cannot live long in a nihilistic, code-red condition the teacher-of-evil recommends. To pick on the current Machiavellianists once again, American princes are most unlikely to look upon the Constitution as mere parchment; they will not evaluate costs and benefits of US military intervention according to commonsense criteria if said criteria ignore indignities to human liberty or political equality. They might learn, as Ignatieff suggested, to not care about morality in the use of power in a moment of weakness but eventually will unlearn this lesson, returning to themselves and addressing their conscience.

At the risk of excusing Machiavelli but with the intended reward of kindling American interest in his lessons for grand strategy, we consider the thinking of Maurizio Viroli (*Redeeming the Prince* [2014]).<sup>26</sup> Viroli's rejoinder to Mansfield's stark witness about Machiavelli's new prince is just as shocking but far more appealing for an American audience. Ingeniously, Viroli drew on the same passages from *The Prince* and co-opted Mansfield's language but still argued a diametrically opposed case. Viroli

wagered that seducing heads of state away from Church morality and evangelizing them with a new covenant—no-nonsense rules for exercising power over men—implied neither revenge for a discarded secretary of Florence nor even the ambition to be Prince among princes. Machiavelli did not merely wish to convert future rulers to his philosophy; for Viroli, *The Prince* only made sense if Machiavelli sought to *redeem* them. To redeem is to save, to bring someone back from disgrace or certain death, so they may live (and strategize) again within sight of God. Rather than destroy religion, Viroli sees Machiavelli surveying its practical limits in this world but still invoking it to rescue Italy from the cataclysm brewing among anachronistic empires, the corrupt Catholic Church, and the vulnerable system of republican states in the sixteenth century. It was the independence and prosperity of those free states that most concerned Machiavelli in his final chapter, the “Exhortation to Seize Italy and to Free Her from the Barbarians.”<sup>27</sup> Machiavelli’s closing argument is seen as the key to the entire book and his new philosophy: Italian states, well-ruled and at peace with one another, could, “with God’s help,” bring about justice through “good political order.”<sup>28</sup>

If Viroli is correct that there is a viable Christian republican reading of Machiavelli, then, suddenly, Machiavelli’s whisper to the new breed of princes is both relevant and tantalizing to each generation of free American citizens who superintend their president. The closing exhortation to unite the miserable, disoriented republics of Italy under one flag becomes, however unlikely it might seem, a hymnal for the God-fearing Founders who dared to transform the United States from thirteen miserable, jealous republics. As John Jay paraphrased Shakespeare in “Federalist Paper, No. 3,” in *The Federalist* “I sincerely wish that it may be as clearly foreseen by every good citizen, that whenever the dissolution of the union arrives, America will have reason to exclaim in the words of the Poet, ‘Farewell: A long farewell to all my greatness.’”<sup>29</sup> For the American Founders as for Viroli’s Machiavelli, the humiliation of Italy’s protorepublics by European great powers after the fifteenth century is an object lesson.<sup>30</sup> There will ever be inadequate justice, insufficient freedom, and too little hope of happiness without *virtuous* statesmanship. This professional quality must look to immediate survival and, beyond, to the dignity of the greater republic. Machiavelli would grasp that America’s enormous strength is founded on the enthusiasm of its people, and the foundation is ruined once people come to understand their

government, which derives its authority from consent of the governed, is merely carrying out the devil's work. Even if our prince, laboring under the Constitution and identifying with American political culture, responded to Machiavellian seduction—abandoning archaic sentimentality about the arc of history to embrace modern, scientific management of affairs—could any president (or adviser) long defend such an alien cost-benefit calculus amid domestic skirmishes and inevitable setbacks abroad without engaging his heart, that is, without ever being able to love this philosophy?<sup>31</sup>

Yet, how can Americans hold onto their ideals at the same time they sanction forceful, sometimes ruthless, policies around the world under the obligation to answer threats from other states? Of course, Samuel Huntington and other students of politics tackled similar questions in the decades after World War II, when the United States donned responsibilities and claimed the license of a world power.<sup>32</sup> In the aftermath of 9/11, as network-based actors rose alongside conventional adversaries of the United States, the controversy between pursuit of transcendent ideals and material interests flared once again.<sup>33</sup>

Without defining justice for sixteenth-century Europe, much less for today's United Nations, Machiavelli does provide partial guidance from across the centuries. Perhaps because of our newer technology and subsequent experience we doubt this could be so; however, we would do better to doubt our sense of progress or superiority. The extreme violence endorsed in *The Prince* indicates that for Machiavelli no moral code can stand unscathed against forces of necessity or threats to state survival. Still, Machiavelli clearly condemned cruelties "badly used." If the butchery grew with time, out of proportion to its utility for subjects under the prince's sway, then there was no "remedy for their *state* with God (nor) with men" [emphasis added].<sup>34</sup> Such passages remind readers that whether Machiavelli thinks God is actually present, he knows the possibility exists in the minds of most citizens. All peoples grant that, for necessity of civil order on earth we must at some point accept the authority of one prince or another. Nonetheless the moral judgment of society *does* matter for preservation of the state—and for the prince. Therefore, rulers must hazard this judgment by entering into evils—but only when necessary. Moreover, the people are a crucial judge of what truly constitutes necessity versus inexcusable extremes. Thus, Machiavelli took pains to instruct statesmen on an economy of violence or, as

Markus Fischer argued, on how to comprehend and employ their well-ordered license.<sup>35</sup>

### **Opening the American Mind: Whose End Justifies the Means?**

Fischer's prudential, calculating Machiavelli enriches our understanding of the most famous passages in *The Prince*, thereby connecting this classic work closely, and more fruitfully, to American foreign policy traditions. In chapter 18, "In What Mode Faith Should Be Kept by Princes," there are seminal lines often translated in the popular imagination as "the end justifies the means."<sup>36</sup> Even as sophisticated a reviewer as Ignatieff seemed to reduce this subtle chapter to a sentiment: Do what you want to achieve your end; particularly in the hostile atmosphere of national security competition, if he who cares about morality or the end of history pauses to reconsider, and he who hesitates is lost, then a chief of state must learn not to care. We respond that the phrasing of the original Italian text invites a subtler interpretation.<sup>37</sup>

When these (in)famous lines appear, in the final paragraph of that chapter, Machiavelli is explaining why subjects or citizens will not hold the prince to account once he breaks faith by deviating from accepted moral norms. In the actions of men, Machiavelli wrote, where there is no authoritative tribunal to try whether certain behavior is criminal, "one looks to the end."<sup>38</sup> This is a fair rendering of *si guarda al fine*, but it is worth noting that Machiavelli's choice of the verb *guardare* also has connotations of watch, protect, and account for. Citizens, benighted though they may be, feel themselves entitled to protection and defense provided by the state—as Machiavelli notes. Their desire for security influences their verdict, perhaps more self-interested than moral, on a prince's transgressions. Such would certainly include, for Machiavelli, prudent transgressions against dogmatic, politically popular formulations of strategic realism.

These implications of *guardare* are consistent with Fischer's moderate interpretive approach. Given the prince's duty and interest to maintain the state, the ruled population will naturally grant some license to their leader—their enforcer of order and champion of national reputation—so he may make exceptions to right action in their mind *for the welfare of the state* without thereby soiling his appearance, his personal reputation

for goodness, or his moral authority in the eyes of the many. As Fischer implies, this permissiveness, or room for maneuver, is not unlimited. It requires skill to be used properly and is, therefore, well-ordered license.

Machiavelli is addressing a new prince's understandable concern about losing public approval and risking contempt from the governed. *Si guarda al fine*, "the end is looked to," urges the reader to inquire as to whose end and who is doing the guarding. In the actions of all men, and most of all of princes (who act in the name of the state), the end is watched over. Yes, but *whose* end? For centuries, most Americans have assumed this must mean the prince's desire. Mad George III, for example, as portrayed in the Declaration of Independence, usurped the colonists' natural rights and thus was indicted by Americans—basically, for turning Machiavellian.

Machiavelli, though, wrote about acquiring and maintaining valuable territory, not losing it in colonial rebellion. Did the king lose for following Machiavelli? Intriguingly, for the alternate interpretation—"the end is looked to"—there is no need to be specific about whose desire comes first. The unity, security, and glory of the state are, after all, in the interest of everyone in the population, which comprises (as Machiavelli explicitly states in this crucial paragraph of chapter 18) the common citizen (*molte*), the elite (*pochi*), and the head (*principe*). In his grammar as well as his logic, it seems, Machiavelli sought to master centrifugal forces threatening to dismember any state, even more a republic, which must labor under the challenge of *e pluribus unum*. Who, then, attends the end if it is the security and greatness, or reputation, of the state? This "end," of course, is guarded by all classes, though by different modes of reasoning according to their capacity, as Machiavelli reported. So let a prince bring a people inhabiting their territory, their home and hearth, under his will and thereby maintain the integrity and dignity of the state, and the means will always be judged honorable, and each one (*ciascuno*), each citizen, regardless of whether they belong to the many or the few, will give praise.

Taken in context of the logic of necessity and an economy of violence, unsavory methods to save the union will not be held against the prince. These same actions, though, should they leave the state less secure—or morally contemptible given inexcusable violence—may ruin him. Machiavelli's counsel on acquiring and maintaining the state alerts us that well-ordered license leaves princes a daunting challenge: how to pursue

interest and some sort of justice at once. This is hardly a counsel for prudence as mere strategic caution, as risk-averse and parsimonious use of power in a dangerous world—especially for a state, like America, animated not only by glory but by concerns for justice at home and abroad.

### **Time to Adapt and Modify *The Prince***

The predilection in US broader strategic culture to caricature Machiavelli and discount his relevance for a liberal republic has contributed to a recent string of policy failures. Both allies and adversaries now perceive US relative decline since the troubled interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq and the way each was handled across two presidential administrations. The global financial crisis triggered by the United States in 2008 also has damaged the standing of the American model. The rise and fall of President Obama's foreign policy and a steep decline in public opinion supporting the administration's framework (built across two *National Security Strategy* documents published in 2010 and 2015) prompted a torrent of criticism, including from the president's own lieutenants.<sup>39</sup> The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on Iran's nuclear program, premised upon a war-avoidance strategy and American retrenchment, could appear to ratify perceptions (and reality) of American decline since it concedes precisely what, for decades, bipartisan policy has sought to deny: a credible Iranian nuclear weapon capability.<sup>40</sup> However, neither Obama nor Bush before him deserve all the blame for America's fitful performance in the past two decades, especially when they received inadequate or narrow-minded strategic advice.

President Obama's recent articulation of grand strategy—in remarks to the press and in the administration's 2015 *National Security Strategy*—echoes the old-line realists.<sup>41</sup> The United States does and will continue to do everything within its power to win engagements in defense of its values. However, when there is nothing on the table worth fighting for in Syria, Iraq, Ukraine, Libya, Yemen, or the South China Sea, or in accommodating Iran, despite it being the world's leading state sponsor of terror, then non-intervention and imperturbable caution regarding other powers is the order of the day. The president once summarized this in a polite version: "Don't do stupid stuff."<sup>42</sup> This maxim supposedly solves several problems. It follows Gelb's advice to see costs as they are rather than as politicians wish, and it echoes Ignatieff's advice that

regardless of moral duties and international legal norms, if a military engagement might bring disaster—in Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Libya, Syria, Mali, Ukraine, or East Asia—then it would be stupid to try. It is better not to care. When the United States learns not to care so much, moral and legal principles and the verdict of history are not burdensome. They do not hamper clandestine operations like those used to hunt down and kill bin Laden; at the same time, brush fire conflicts never demand sacrifice. Indeed, risky escalation and costly fighting for a cause are someone else's problem. No matter how badly world affairs trend today, no matter the rise of illiberal and autocratic powers, even terrorist powers, at least we leave behind the era of the preceding prince when America *did* do stupid things and incurred steep costs as a direct result.

Nonetheless, a strategic formula so tidy and politically expedient for the second term was bound to distort rather than channel Machiavelli. The policy mining of *The Prince* and convenient refinements of the realist brief elide fundamental controversies about Machiavelli's philosophy that scandalized Renaissance Italy and early modern Europe. These controversies simmer underneath the world headlines blaring about globalization or the US pivot to Asia. American statesmen and their counselors should remember that scholars are divided on strategic realism. Was Machiavelli a teacher of evil or a tough-minded redeemer for Italy—and, by extension, all republics? Was he anticipating twentieth-century nihilism, or did he long for a return to republican liberty? Many read the deceptively accessible arguments of *The Prince* as part of their strategic education, but few discern a seminal philosopher with deep and challenging guidance for American grand strategy.

### **Strategic Realism and American Prudence**

As we enter another presidential campaign season, we caution American princes and their counselors. In an era of doctrinal conflict for international relations theory, with armed trenches dividing realists, liberal internationalists, and constructivists—and similarly doctrinaire polarization among camps of Republicans versus Democrats and interventionists versus isolationists—we can profitably consider that Machiavelli counseled not rigid extremism but rather intellectual moderation about power and politics.



Seeing Machiavelli's moderation does not mean we pardon his immoderate stance toward sacred honor, religion, or ethics. Unless our leaders (elected politicians and their counselors) would change America's character, the United States cannot blithely descend, under the guise of strategic realism, to astute immorality—even if it means US leaders will accept greater risk to themselves and their country's fortunes than Machiavelli would. The extra burden growing out of the Founders' constitutionalism requires that the prince must debate or test his policies and his grand strategy with Congress, and this comports with Machiavelli's counsel for balance. The salutary moderation we take from Machiavelli means embracing the competing principles and tradeoffs rulers face. Circumstances are fluid, and the course of hazards always shifts. Formulaic advice from one academic school or another, though easiest for a prince to imbibe and counselors to offer, is suspect—for Machiavelli and for us five centuries on.

Yes, Machiavelli prized astuteness in grand strategy but never to a cautious extreme. Today's strategic realism jeopardizes the security and reputation of the American state just as extravagant use of force did before it. Republican princes as much as others must lead through *virtù*—a prudent faculty for consolidating state power while coping with the whims of *Fortuna*. An effective prince, in other words, cannot be predominantly man or beast, and when beast, the prince must don the attributes of both fox and lion.<sup>43</sup> Dilemmas of the world—and an American executive in the twenty-first century must think globally—always demand adept balances. The mostly-overlooked tensions in Machiavelli's thought thus counsel skepticism about formulas that eliminate the need to place bets as a leader to take bold stands for enlightened interest or principle rather than wait for fortune (or adversaries) to decide. Even the most powerful rulers cannot stand pat at each individual crisis, imagining that, somehow inert, it must begin and end in total isolation from future bargaining. American presidents, too, must seize the initiative and accept risk to advance or protect interests, power, and ideals. Machiavelli scoffed at temporizing to avoid problems. Had Machiavelli heard of such policies or strategies as strategic restraint and offshore balancing, or alternately preemptive war and domino theory, he would have recognized how a prince obeisant to public fears could follow any one of them to perdition. He would be particularly dismayed, then, that his argument in *The Prince* is twisted to compound the hidden but real dan-

gers of guileless strategic withdrawal. Machiavelli counseled it is better to be feared than loved, but it is best to be both (chapter 17), which in democratic politics will require of the elected leader a healthy amount of dash. Today, as in international politics before, *Fortuna* ultimately favors the bold.<sup>44</sup> For the president's second term and beyond, this requires a man or woman of laws who is sly like a fox yet knows when to keep opponents at bay by acting the lion.

Machiavelli's complex balancing of roles required a defense of evil, thus moral agnosticism, which admitted an economy of violence and impious acts. If such dirty deeds are either shunned or indulged it would mean the ruin of a prince's political capital, the long-term foundation of his authority. Machiavelli's clear-eyed analysis of power and interest led progeny in Europe and America to formulate many refinements and subvarieties of amoral realism.<sup>45</sup> Our moderate reading of Machiavelli challenges the facile and too common realist approach. Just as not all *virtù* is common sense (e.g., it is not so easy to know when to be bold), not all prudence fits neatly within doctrines. Prudent leadership in democracy demands artifice through a summoning of intellect in addition to armed force and superior will; in its Machiavellian form it recommends, as Fischer termed it, well-ordered license. The necessary ratio of fox to lion, of being loved or feared, is never clear in advance. That said, Americans must take Machiavelli in moderation, blending a human element with these base realities of global affairs, to be not just the eagle but to defend right as an eternal, transcendent objective: *novus ordo seclorum* in the Founders' Latin phrase.<sup>46</sup> Because this precludes a foreign policy of evil actions for sheer advantage, America must invest in extended deterrence, pay for global capability, and cultivate a willingness to accept risk in order to preserve alliances with other republics.

In response to spreading crises through multiple regions of the world, President Obama insisted that the astute baseball manager prefers "small ball" to recklessly swinging for the fences. There is in such strategic discourse and in the president's *National Security Strategy* a hint of *post facto* rationalization, of tunnel vision masquerading as prudence. Formulaic risk aversion actually discourages frank assessment of a fluid and interconnected security environment. Again, Machiavelli is apropos to resisting overcorrections in grand strategy: "It is found that one never seeks to avoid one inconvenience without running into another; but prudence

consists in knowing how to recognize the qualities of inconveniences, and in picking the less bad as good.”<sup>47</sup>

Admittedly, any administration can easily dismiss critics in the gallery. Observers have the luxury and, in the United States, the freedom to chastise the executive for inaction in Syria, Afghanistan, Ukraine, Iraq, Yemen, or elsewhere, not knowing what consequences action would have wrought. Still, even the president’s friends at home and abroad increasingly warn of disturbing *trends* in the words and deeds of his second term, and these criticisms have registered in the polls on foreign policy performance. Regardless of whether specific concessions in each instance were cheaper than fighting, the global series of diplomatic setbacks framed by the president’s determination to avoid another American war instantiates for friend and foe the impression of an American executive overwhelmed, unable to anticipate threats, losing initiative and command. This mounting preoccupation in public as well as elite opinion, beyond any one tactical decision, exposes drift and confusion in US foreign policy.

It is hopeful, in a sense, that there is growing consensus that the tenor of current US foreign policy is extremely risk averse or immoderate. Again, contrary to conventional interpretations of realism, *The Prince’s* counsel for nuance and a daring blend of offense with defense affirms rather than assuages such concerns. Negotiations, symbolic deeds, or partial sanctions will cost more and produce less diplomatic leverage day-after-day, compared to policies that force others to rebalance their strategic conceptions and strategic guidance that allows for calibrated risk of military operations abroad.<sup>48</sup> As events spiral out of control, the president’s options will narrow and the price of war avoidance at each crisis will grow. He will impress no one at home or abroad with lawyerly presentations about what the United States did *not* do or sundry hypotheticals the country managed to sidestep thus, we can expect the enduring, churning pattern of world politics to swamp American exceptionalism. Lack of a viable candidate in our time to replace America as the leading crafter of international order buttresses Machiavelli’s counsel against doctrinaire risk avoidance.

Any American executive who would lead the world must defend his previous ideas and avoid stupid mistakes, of course, but he also “needs to have a spirit disposed to change as the winds of fortune and variations of things command him.”<sup>49</sup> As American fortunes in the world have

changed, the American executive has not adapted strategic realism, and the energy of the office has waned. Despite omens of violent change, threatening to destroy institutional structures of the American-led international order, the United States currently lacks the strategy and, Machiavelli might add, the spirit to restore its national security tradition of prudence in the presence of evil—of balancing power, legitimacy, and risk according to a principle of enlightened self-interest.

### **Conclusion: Toward Enlightened Self-Interest**

Machiavelli's counsel for post-Cold War America might ultimately be that embracing strategic realism—if it means refusing good works, avoiding all risks, and never being good in order to keep from doing stupid things—effectively hands over perfect intelligence and initiative to a state's adversaries. There is no dignity, no successful diplomacy, nor ultimate security in such a cautious, hollow grand strategy. Acting effectively in a world of competing sovereign states *at times* involves hypocrisy, betrayal of ironclad commitments to principle, and taking enemies by surprise. Machiavelli pointed out that citizens who are worthy of securing will accept evils orchestrated by the prince if such evils are tied to the well-being of the state, but it does nevertheless fall to the prince to correctly anticipate when flexibility in tactics really is necessary. If the prince gets the balance wrong, shifting his stance too late or too early, he and the state will pay dearly.

If the United States hopes to realize its professed aim to lead and sustain a liberal global order, it can ill afford such strategic mistakes, and a fuller appreciation of Machiavelli would be particularly useful. While American strategy must continually temper his perspective, the United States would do well to heed Machiavelli's advice on gamesmanship and his disdain for rigid prescriptions either to act the gladiator at all events *or* to frame every crisis as a war hazard—a brush fire amid dry tinder to be extinguished or avoided at whatever price.<sup>50</sup>

Rather than instructing us to neglect moral constraints, act dishonorably, and become evil—a policy that would devour America's constitutional limits on government and eventually the state itself in a fever of nihilism—*The Prince* can be read to urge republican statesmen to think carefully about moral suasion and measure it accurately against competing dangers of violence, submission, or penury for the state. The commotion of

*The Prince's* 500th anniversary has receded, but those considering prospects for a Second American Century after 2017 have yet to properly recognize Machiavelli's deeper contribution. A prudent reading of Machiavelli, one that empathizes with princes rather than dehumanizing them or subordinating them to abstract theories of realism or idealism, would highlight the difficult judgments princes can expect rather than denying such burdens. Our view offers a more fruitful path for future American strategists and a more sober yet exceptionalist context for US foreign policy debates. In Machiavelli's republics as well as our own, a clear picture of enduring dilemmas tied to republican stewardship ultimately benefits the ideals *and* interests of the electorate, whose relationship with their chief executive is crucial to the state's power and influence. A more discerning basis for strategy would prevent our elites and the broader electorate from falling for the policy extremes of recent decades—in which we lurched from demanding a perfect defense to expecting too little of the presidency and America.

Consensus held in the last century that America would sacrifice to defend a cosmopolitan civilization as the best way to secure its interests while strengthening ideals of law and right as limits upon power, war, and ruthlessness. Now, we should recover strategic balance: calculating enough to survive the snares and monstrous threats of international politics, and cognizant of the tragic history of hubris in international affairs (our own included), yet retaining a larger purpose in the world to prudently guard the principle of liberty and justice for all. Enlightened self-interest honors principles of right and peaceful global order, now, as the best path to maintain our material strength and security for liberty over the long run.<sup>51</sup> In the turbulence of the post–Cold War era, coupled with increasing polarization and partisanship about foreign policy at home, we have lost our strategic compass for prudential balance, careening half-panicked from hyperactivity to the even less Machiavellian paralysis of small ball. A genuine dose of Machiavellian *virtù* tempered by American enlightened self-interest would help our next chief executive, as steward of the Republic, to lift US strategy without overinflating American commitment around the world. Riskier though it may be in the near term, Machiavelli would heartily approve if the next US strategy actively engaged fortune while pressing the commitment to a better Rome. ■■■

## Notes

1. An earlier version of this article was presented at the ISSS-ISAC Joint Sectional of the International Studies Association and the American Political Science Association, Austin, TX, November 2014. The authors also draw upon an earlier collaboration with our colleague Dr. Roger Harrison on Machiavelli's relevance for current strategic debates.

2. Michael Ignatieff, "Machiavelli Was Right," *The Atlantic*, December 2013, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2013/12/machiavelli-was-right/354672/>.

3. In addition to Ignatieff's 2013 essay, defenders of Obama's just-right recalibration include Fareed Zakaria, "On Foreign Policy, Why Barack is Like Ike," *Time*, 19 December 2012; Joseph Nye, *Presidential Leadership and the Creation of the American Era* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013); and Barry Posen, *Restraint: A New Foundation for U.S. Grand Strategy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014).

4. Peter Feaver, ed., *Strategic Retrenchment and Renewal* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 2014), 1–6.

5. This is the larger theme of Henry Kissinger's *World Order* (New York: Penguin Press, 2014); American grand strategy, and the liberal world order it built and now should renovate, must balance ideals of freedom and legitimacy with realities about power and thus accommodation of other civilizations and great powers (e.g., 8–10, 232–335, 362–63, 367, 370, and 373–74).

6. For a related, but still distinct, analysis of the Obama policies and grand strategy, see Colin Dueck, *The Obama Doctrine: American Grand Strategy Today* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015). For our conception of grand strategy and its priority for guiding and testing policy, we draw upon (among other works) Dueck; Hal Brands, *What Good Is Grand Strategy? Power and Purpose in American Statecraft from Harry S. Truman to George W. Bush* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014); and William C. Martel, *Grand Strategy in Theory and Practice: The Need for an Effective American Foreign Policy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

7. See Harvey C. Mansfield, *Taming the Prince: The Ambivalence of Modern Executive Power* (New York: Free Press, 1989), chapters 8–10 on Locke, Montesquieu, and America's Founders. This adaptation also is the theme of the essays in Paul Rahe, ed., *Machiavelli's Liberal Republican Legacy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006), spanning English revolutionary republicanism, the moderate Enlightenment, and America's Founders.

8. For an overview of this argument see, Kissinger, *World Order*; Walter Russell Mead, *Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How It Changed the World* (New York: Routledge, 2002); and Jonathan Monten, "The Roots of the Bush Doctrine: Power, Nationalism, and Democracy Promotion in U.S. Strategy," *International Security* 29, no. 4 (Spring 2005): 112–56.

9. John T. Scott and Robert Zaretsky, "Why Machiavelli Still Matters," *New York Times*, 9 December 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/10/opinion/why-machiavelli-matters.html>; John Danford, "Getting Our Bearings: Machiavelli and Hume," in *Machiavelli's Liberal Republican Legacy*, edited by Paul Rahe (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 94–120, esp. 95; William Landon, *Politics, Patriotism and Language: Niccolò Machiavelli's "Secular Patria" and the Creation of an Italian National Identity* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2005), 79.

10. Walter Russell Mead, "Stratblog: The Virtues of Machiavelli," *The American Interest*, 2 April 2011, <http://www.the-american-interest.com/2011/04/02/stratblog-the-virtues-of-machiavelli/>.

11. Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Irony of American History* (1952; repr., Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008); and Paul Elie, "A Man for All Reasons," *The Atlantic*, November 2007, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2007/11/a-man-for-all-reasons/306337/>.

12. Barack Obama, "Remarks by the President at the Acceptance of the Nobel Peace Prize" (press release, Office of the Press Secretary, Oslo, Norway, 10 December 2009), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-acceptance-nobel-peace-prize>.

13. Leslie Gelb, *Power Rules: How Common Sense Can Rescue American Foreign Policy* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2009), ix.

14. Negotiations for the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) finally concluded in October 2015 and will require President Obama to secure majority support from both houses of Congress, deep in the fourth quarter of his presidency, amid an election year and when his relations with Congress on both domestic and foreign policy are at their lowest point. While the TPP could be a victory for his pivot strategy on Asia, a high price paid for this multiyear effort is that China has secured territorial and military gains in the interim.

15. Roger Harrison, "Machiavelli Speaks: A Realist Raised from the Dead," *The American Interest*, 16 December 2014, <http://www.the-american-interest.com/2014/12/16/a-realist-raised-from-the-dead/>.

16. Walter Russell Mead, "Grand Strategy: The End of History Ends," *The American Interest*, 2 December 2013, <http://www.the-american-interest.com/2013/12/02/2013-the-end-of-history-ends-2/>; Victor Davis Hanson, "A New Obama Doctrine?" *National Review*, 18 March 2014, <http://www.nationalreview.com/article/373523/new-obama-doctrine-victor-davis-hanson>; David Rothkopf, "Obama's 'Don't Do Stupid Shit' Foreign Policy," *Foreign Policy*, 4 June 2014, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/06/04/obamas-dont-do-stupid-shit-foreign-policy/>; and Stephen Walt, "What Putin Learned from Reagan," *Foreign Policy*, 17 February 2015, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/02/17/what-putin-learned-from-reagan-ukraine-nicaragua/>.

17. Analysts and journals usually sympathetic to the Obama presidency have issued stark appraisals of the international costs of the deal; one made just weeks after it survived Congressional review (with distinctly minority support) is David Rothkopf, "Leave It to Vlad (and the Supreme Leader): The Obama Plan to Exit the Middle East Now Becomes Clear," *Foreign Policy*, 28 September 2015.

18. Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, translated by Harvey Mansfield, 2nd ed. (1985; repr., Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 100.

19. *Ibid.*, chapter 23, 94.

20. See also, Bob Woodward, *Obama's Wars* (London, UK: Simon & Schuster UK Ltd., 2010); and Stanley McChrystal, *My Share of the Task* (New York: Penguin Group, 2013).

21. Machiavelli, *The Prince*, chapter 23, 93.

22. Carnes Lord, *The Modern Prince: What Leaders Need to Know Now* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004); Gelb, *Power Rules*; and Ignatieff, "Machiavelli Was Right."

23. Friedrich Meinecke, *Machiavellism: The Doctrine of Raison D'Etat and Its Place in Modern History*, translated by Douglas Scott (1924; repr., New York: Praeger, 1965); Leo Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1958); and Harvey Mansfield, *Machiavelli's Virtue* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

24. Mansfield, *Machiavelli's Virtue*, ix.

25. Machiavelli, *The Prince*, chapter 15, 61.
26. Maurizio Viroli, *Redeeming the Prince: The Meaning of Machiavelli's Masterpiece* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014).
27. Machiavelli, *The Prince*, chapter 26, 101.
28. Viroli, *Redeeming the Prince*, 3.
29. In Shakespeare's Henry VIII, Act III, Sc. 1, Cardinal Wolsey utters this line when, undone by ambition to promote himself, he is exposed as serving the Pope (the Vatican corporation) instead of his country. George Carey and James McClellan, eds., *The Federalist*, by Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, and James Madison, Gideon Edition (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 2001), 9.
30. See Jay's reference to the weak Italian republic of Genoa genuflecting before the King of France at the end of Federalist No. 3; see also Jay at the end of Federalist No. 4, wherein he warns, "What a poor, pitiful figure will America make in their eyes!"
31. Henry Kissinger, America's Machiavelli figure as national security advisor and secretary of state to US presidents during the Cold War, is an exception that proves the rule. His later works take into account moral sentiment of the American people as a source of US power, almost as a lesson learned from his younger years in government when idealism, at the time, seemed needlessly to constrain or derail effective (Machiavellian) foreign policy. Compare *Does America Need a Foreign Policy*, *On China*, and *World Order* to earlier works such as *Diplomacy* and *White House Years*. Henry Kissinger, *Does America Need a Foreign Policy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001); *On China* (New York: Penguin Press, 2011); *World Order* (New York: Penguin Press, 2014); *Diplomacy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994); and *White House Years* (Boston, MA: Little Brown & Co., 1979).
32. Samuel Huntington, "American Ideals versus American Institutions," *Political Science Quarterly* 97, no. 1 (Spring 1982): 1–37; and George Kennan, "Morality and Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs* (Winter 1985/86): 205–18.
33. Monten, "The Roots of the Bush Doctrine;" Nye, *Presidential Leadership and the Creation*; Stephen Sestanovich, *Maximalist: America in the World from Truman to Obama* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014); and Feaver, *Strategic Retrenchment*.
34. Machiavelli, *The Prince*, chapter 8, 37–38.
35. Markus Fischer, *Well-Ordered License: On the Unity of Machiavelli's Thought* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2000); and Markus Fischer, "Machiavelli's Rapacious Republicanism," in *Machiavelli's Liberal Republican Legacy*, edited by Paul Rahe (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006), xxxi–lxii.
36. Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 67.
37. For these crucial lines, often cited as the essence of Machiavelli's strategic thought, we follow the model of literary analysis pioneered in W. Robert Connor's work on Thucydides' text, *History of the Peloponnesian War*. W. Robert Connor, *Thucydides* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984). In this same vein and influential in the Brady–Johnson Grand Strategy Program at Yale is Charles Hill, *Grand Strategies: Literature, Statecraft and World Order* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010).
38. Machiavelli, *The Prince*, chapter 18, 71.
39. Robert Gates, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014); Leon Panetta, *Worthy Fights* (New York: Penguin Press, 2014); Jeffrey Golberg, "Hillary Clinton: 'Failure' to Help Syrian Rebels Led to the Rise of ISIS," *The Atlantic*, 10 August 2014, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/08/hillary-clinton-failure-to-help-syrian-rebels>



-led-to-the-rise-of-isis/375832/; Juliet Eilperin, "Hillary Clinton Criticizes President Obama's Foreign Policy in Interview with the Atlantic," *Washington Post*, 11 August 2014, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/hillary-clinton-criticizes-president-obamas-foreign-policy-in-interview-with-the-atlantic/2014/08/11/46d30564-2170-11e4-8593-da634b334390\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/hillary-clinton-criticizes-president-obamas-foreign-policy-in-interview-with-the-atlantic/2014/08/11/46d30564-2170-11e4-8593-da634b334390_story.html); and Jeffrey Goldberg, "A Withering Critique of Obama's National Security Council" (interview with David Rothkopf, author of *National Insecurity* [New York: Public Affairs, 2014]) *The Atlantic*, 12 November 2014, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/11/a-withering-critique-of-president-obamas-national-security-council/382477/>.

40. For measured analyses stating concerns and criticism about the JCPOA from experienced American diplomats and from public figures supportive of President Obama on other policies, see Henry Kissinger and George Shultz, "The Iran Deal and Its Consequences," *Wall Street Journal*, 7 April 2015 (addressing the initial Framework deal); Dennis Ross, "Iran Deal Leaves U.S. with Tough Questions," *Washington Post*, 14 July 2015, "How to Make Iran Keep Its Word," *Politico Magazine*, 29 July 2015; Walter Russell Mead, "The Strategic Impact of the Iran Deal," *The American Interest*, 5 August 2015; and Charles E. Schumer, "My Position on the Iran Deal," *Medium* (blog), 6 August 2015, <https://medium.com/@SenSchumer/my-position-on-the-iran-deal-e976b2f13478>.

41. Barack Obama, *National Security Strategy* (Washington, DC: White House, February 2015), [https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2015\\_national\\_security\\_strategy.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2015_national_security_strategy.pdf). For critical reviews, see Peter Feaver, "Grading Obama's National Security Strategy 2.0," *Foreign Policy*, 6 February 2015, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/02/06/grading-obamas-national-security-strategy-2-0/>; and Thomas Wright, "Interpreting the National Security Strategy," Up Front (blog), Brookings Institution, 6 February 2015, <http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/up-front/posts/2015/02/06-interpreting-the-national-security-strategy>.

42. Rothkopf, "Obama's 'Don't Do Stupid'."

43. Machiavelli, *The Prince*, chapter 18, 69.

44. "It is better to be impetuous than cautious." "Fortune is a woman . . . [and] like a woman, she is the friend of the young because they are less cautious, more ferocious, and command her with more audacity." Ibid., chapter 25, 101.

45. Realists insist there is moral value in effectiveness, and it is hard to be an effective great power by promising human rights protection or democratic transformation abroad then failing to deliver for lack of resources or resourcefulness. Sean Kay, *America's Search for Security: The Triumph of Idealism and the Return of Realism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 20. We grant this. Nonetheless, most moral choices, including in world politics, involve increased risks or costs not utter destruction in the line of duty. Realism as a prescriptive theory goes too far, becomes amoral, and loses sight of a deeper prudence when it teaches leaders of great states to sacrifice nothing, ever, for higher purposes. Kay provides examples of the situations in Iran in 1979, Rwanda in 1994, and Egypt in 2011. In contrast, see Paul Carrese, "The Grand Strategy of Washington and Eisenhower: Recovering the American Consensus," *Orbis* 59, no. 2 (Spring 2015): 269–86. Carrese challenges the reading of Dwight Eisenhower as narrowly realist and cautious.

46. This is the view of the response to Machiavelli developed by America's Founders, in the chapters on Washington (by Matthew Spalding) and Hamilton (by Karl Walling) in *Machiavelli's Liberal Republican Legacy*, edited by Paul Rahe (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

47. Machiavelli, *The Prince*, chapter 21, 91.

48. Goldberg, "A Withering Critique."

49. Machiavelli, *The Prince*, chapter 18, 70.

50. For a critical but respectful analysis of the Florentine's contributions to modern strategic studies, see David Hendrickson, "Machiavelli and Machiavellism," in *Machiavelli's Legacy: The Prince After 500 Years*, edited by Timothy Fuller (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016). Our broad conception of grand strategy draws upon philosophical approaches, such as Hill, *Grand Strategies*, and more policy-oriented views, as in Peter Feaver et al., *Strategic Retrenchment*, 3, and Peter Feaver, "What is Grand Strategy and Why Do We Need It?," *Foreign Policy*, 8 April 2009.

51. For more on enlightened self-interest and sources for this concept in American strategy, see Carrese, "The Grand Strategy of Washington and Eisenhower."

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